**ITEM 10:**

Vote on whether to amend the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever Project Boundary to add two parcels totaling approximately ± 660 acres in Hardee County with a tax assessed market value of $3,599,086.

**LOCATION:**

Hardee County

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:**

The Ludwig Ranch amendment proposed by the Florida Conservation Group adds two parcels in Hardee County totaling approximately ± 660 acres to the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project. The two parcels are owned by Ludwig Land LLC. The parcels have a combined tax assessed value of $3,599,086 and are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The Ludwig Ranch property is in southwestern Hardee County in the watershed of Horse Creek, about 10 miles southwest of Zolfo Springs and 12 miles northeast of Myakka City. A portion of the property is identified as Priority 3 within the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN). The property is currently used for cattle and sod. Slightly more than half of the property is naturally vegetated. The western third of the property is wooded, grading from seemingly intact flatwoods at higher elevations along the western edge to a band of hardwood forests in the lower elevations. A portion of Brushy Creek flows through the western portion of the property. Improvements include barns, and other structures related to the current cattle operation. All landowners have been contacted and are willing sellers.

The proposal meets the criteria to be submitted as a boundary amendment. The parcels have a tax assessed value of less than $5 million. The proposal area should be designated as essential.

*Project History:*

The Myakka Ranchlands Project in DeSoto, Hardee, Manatee and Sarasota Counties was added to the Florida Forever Priority List in 2007. The Myakka Ranchlands project contains land areas in the vicinity of Myakka River State Park, that contribute to the creation of a corridor of conservation lands in southwest Florida to protect the Myakka River watershed and Charlotte Harbor Estuary. Additionally, the project will protect land known to support habitat for rare and imperiled species.

The Myakka Ranchlands project includes over 55,392 acres with 25,627 acres remaining and is ranked number four in the Less-Than-Fee category on the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List. The tax assessed value for the remaining acres to be acquired in this project per property appraiser information (2024) is $399,959,799.

*FNAI Review:*

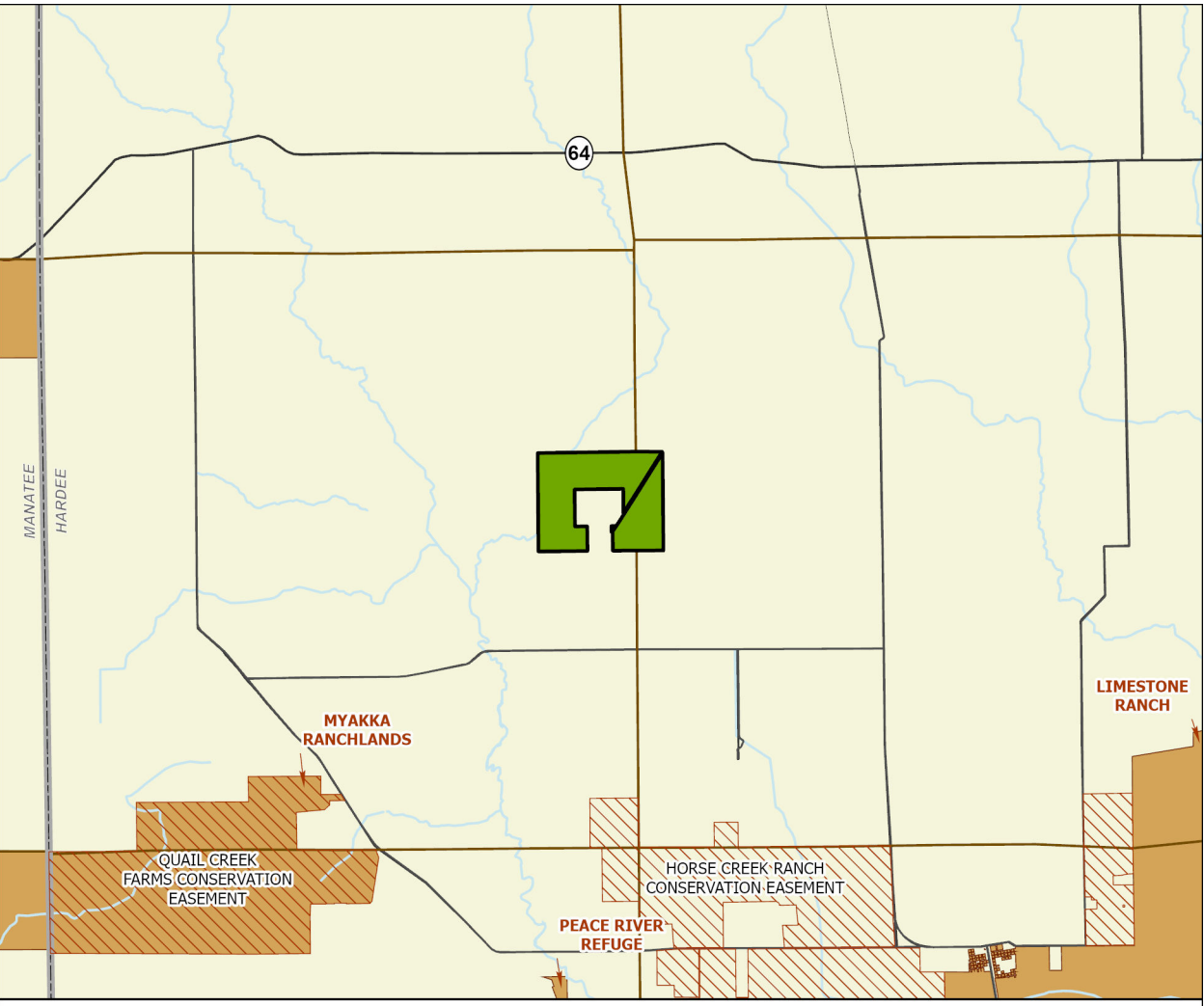
According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), the entire tract contributes to FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities, Surface Water Protection, and Aquifer Recharge. Approximately half of the site contributes to Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas and Ecological Greenways. About one-third of the site contributes to Natural Floodplain Function and Functional Wetlands. FNAI indicates that 11% of the site consists of mesic and/or wet flatwoods, both of which are Under-represented Natural Communities; based on examination of aerial photos, the actual number of flatwoods may be closer to 20%.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

| Project | DHR | FFS | Griner | DEP | FWC | Palmer | Peppers | Watts | Gamblin | Select |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | |




# MYAKKA RANCHLANDS FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT
# LUDWIG RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

## HARDEE COUNTY

- Florida Forever Proposed Addition
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- Other Conservation Lands

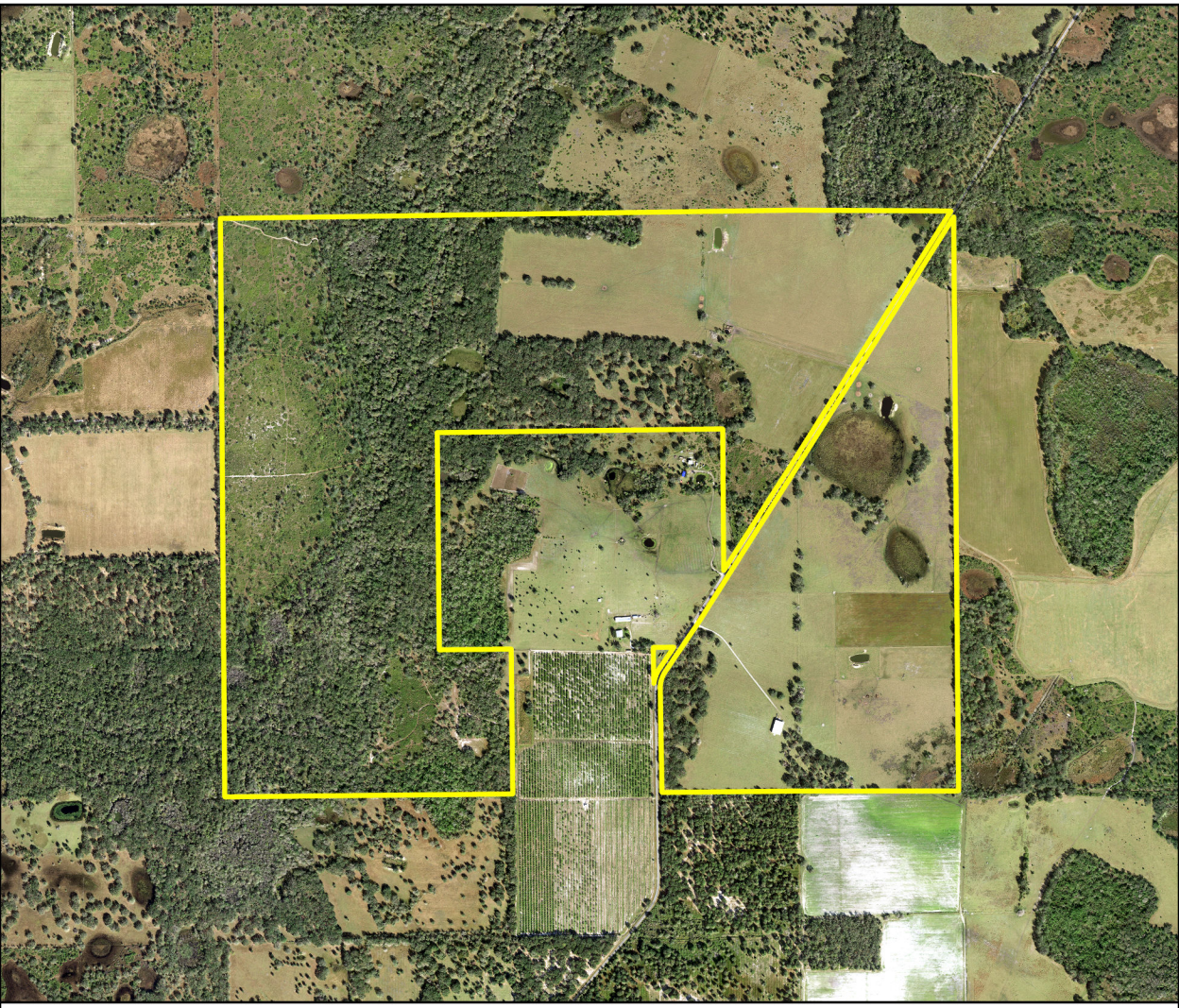

N

0 2 4 Miles

MAP BY FL NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY APRIL 2025

# MYAKKA RANCHLANDS FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT
# LUDWIG RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED ADDITION AS OF APRIL 2025



Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, April 2025

Background: FDOT 2023 Aerial Imagery Resolution = 0.2 meter

Florida Forever Proposed Addition

FNAI

N

0 0.25 0.5 1

Miles

**Myakka Ranchlands Addition (Ludwig Ranch): Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20250422**

GIS ACRES = 660

| MEASURES | Resource Acres[a] | % of project |
|---|---|---|
| **B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 3 | 93 | 14% |
| Priority 4 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 5 | 260 | 39% |
| Total Acres | 353 | 53% |
| **B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 3 | 1 | < 1% |
| Priority 4 | 131 | 20% |
| Priority 5 | 293 | 44% |
| Priority 6 | 236 | 36% |
| Total Acres | 661 | 100% |
| **B3: Ecological Greenways** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 3 | 315 | 48% |
| Priority 4 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 5 | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 315 | 48% |
| **B4: Under-represented Natural Communities** | | |
| Upland Glade (G1) | 0 | 0% |
| Pine Rockland (G1) | 0 | 0% |
| Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2) | 0 | 0% |
| Rockland Hammock (G2) | 0 | 0% |
| Dry Prairie (G2) | 0 | 0% |
| Seepage Slope (G2) | 0 | 0% |
| Sandhill (G3) | 0 | 0% |
| Sandhill Upland Lake (G3) | 0 | 0% |
| Upland Pine (G3) | 0 | 0% |
| Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4) | 73 | 11% |
| Upland Hardwood Forest (G5) | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 73 | 11% |
| **B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species** | | |
| G1 | 0 | |
| G2 | 0 | |
| G3 | 0 | |
| G4 | 0 | |
| G5 | 0 | |
| Total | 0 | |
| **C4: Natural Floodplain Function** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 69 | 10% |
| Priority 3 | 146 | 22% |
| Priority 4 | 10 | 1% |
| Priority 5 | 17 | 3% |
| Priority 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 242 | 37% |

| MEASURES (continued) | Resource Acres[a] | % of project |
|---|---|---|
| **C5: Surface Water Protection** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 3 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 4 | 251 | 38% |
| Priority 5 | 120 | 18% |
| Priority 6 | 229 | 35% |
| Priority 7 | 61 | 9% |
| Total Acres | 661 | 100% |
| **C7: Fragile Coastal Resources** | | |
| Fragile Coastal Uplands | 0 | 0% |
| Imperiled Coastal Lakes | 0 | 0% |
| Coastal Wetlands | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 0 | 0% |
| **C8: Functional Wetlands** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 57 | 9% |
| Priority 3 | 143 | 22% |
| Priority 4 | 10 | 2% |
| Priority 5 | 17 | 3% |
| Priority 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 227 | 34% |
| **D3: Aquifer Recharge** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 5 | < 1% |
| Priority 3 | 140 | 21% |
| Priority 4 | 395 | 60% |
| Priority 5 | 121 | 18% |
| Priority 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Total Acres | 661 | 100% |
| **E2: Recreational Trails** (miles) | | |
| (prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida) | | |
| Land Trail Priorities | 0.0 | |
| Land Trail Opportunities | 0.0 | |
| Total Miles | 0.0 | |
| **F2: Arch. & Historical Sites** (number) | 0 | sites |
| **G1: Sustainable Forestry** | | |
| Priority 1 | 0 | 0% |
| Priority 2 | 26 | 4% |
| Priority 3 | 26 | 4% |
| Priority 4 | 20 | 3% |
| Priority 5 | 1 | < 1% |
| Total Acres | 73 | 11% |
| **G3: Forestland for Recharge** | 23 | 4% |

[a]Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

To: Meghan Lauer, DEP/OES
From: Geoffrey Parks, FNAI
Date: May 19, 2025
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: Myakka Ranchlands – Ludwig (Hardee County)

The major goals of the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever Project are to create a corridor of conservation lands in southwest Florida, add significant acreage to the conservation lands already protecting the Myakka River watershed and Charlotte Harbor Estuary, and protect habitat for numerous rare and imperiled species. The ca. 659.9-acre Ludwig property is proposed as an addition to the project. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The proposed addition is located in southwestern Hardee County in the watershed of Horse Creek, about 10 miles southwest of Zolfo Springs and 12 miles northeast of Myakka City. The tract is shaped like a "C" on its side with the opening downward. Post Plant Road crosses the property from the northeastern corner southwest, turning south along the interior property boundary; the tract fronts this road for about 1.2 miles. The nearest existing conservation lands are Quail Creek Farms Conservation Easement to the southwest (ca. 3.5 miles away), Horse Creek Ranch Conservation Easement and Horse Creek Conservation Easement ca. 2.5 miles to the south, and Limestone Creek Ranch Agricultural and Conservation Easement, about 5 miles to the southeast. The nearest unacquired lands in the Myakka Ranchlands FFBOT project are ca. 5 miles west; other FFBOT projects in the region include the Peace River Refuge project (ca. 4.3 miles south), and the Limestone Ranch project (ca. 5 miles southeast).

Slightly more than half of the Ludwig property is naturally vegetated. The western third of the property is wooded, grading from seemingly intact flatwoods at higher elevations along the western edge to a band of hardwood forests (likely mesic and hydric hammock) in the lower elevations surrounding Brushy Creek, which flows from north to south across the western part of the tract. A few areas of cypress swamp and baygall are found along the slopes above the creek, likely hydrated by groundwater seepage and surface runoff from the uplands. The tract's highest elevations are in its eastern half, which is predominantly cleared for improved and semi-improved pastures, which make up about 46% of the site.

The FNAI Florida Natural Heritage Database has no documentation of rare or imperiled species on the site. The application lists numerous rare and imperiled species that can use the types of natural communities and cover types said to occur on the site, but it does not indicate that any of these species have been seen on the proposed addition. The flatwoods on the property could provide habitat for various rare plants, as well as vertebrates such as gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and Bachman's sparrow (*Peucaea aestivalis*); additional rare species may occur in the forests along the creek as well as in pastures.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) below is based on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment developed by FNAI. The data used in that analysis represent a standardized, statewide perspective of natural resources. According to the FFME, the entire tract contributes to FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities (mainly priorities 4-6), Surface Water Protection (priorities 4-7), and Aquifer Recharge (mostly priority 4). Approximately half of the site contributes to Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (53%, mainly priority 5) and Ecological Greenways (48%, priority 3). About one-third of the site contributes to Natural Floodplain Function (37%) and Functional Wetlands (34%).. The FFME indicates that 11% of the site consists of mesic and/or wet flatwoods, both of which are Under-represented Natural Communities; based on examination of aerial photos, the actual amount of flatwoods may be closer to 20%.